

Project title:  
**Red Sea Dolphin Project**



# **Expedition Briefing**

**Everything you need to know before you go**

# 2011



[www.hepca.com](http://www.hepca.com)

<http://redseadolphinproject.wordpress.com>



## **Our Mission**

The Hurghada Environmental Protection and Conservation Association (HEPCA) is a leading non-governmental organization (NGO) working in the field of marine and land conservation. Founded in 1992, HEPCA is actively working towards the goal of protecting and preserving the natural resources of Egypt and the Red Sea

**With knowledge comes great responsibility.** Over eight million visitors are drawn to Egypt and the Red Sea every year. Environmental deterioration is no longer a threat but a reality.

We work together with our members and partners to develop and maintain a large number of projects and campaigns that help to ensure the preservation and sustainability of the Red Sea environment for the future.

HEPCA believes in visionary thinking and progressive action to bring about positive change. As a non-profit organization, we rely on support from individuals and other organizations that believe in maximizing their contribution to our world.

We believe that achieving a sustainable future requires objective scientific data from the field and that the scientific process must engage the general public if it is to change the world. To that end, we involve people from all walks of life directly in global field research.

In order to provide a solid scientific basis for management purposes HEPCA has launched the Red Sea Dolphin Project, the first research project extensively dedicated on dolphins and whales (cetaceans) in the Egyptian Red Sea with the main aim to contribute to the existing knowledge of Red Sea cetaceans and advance our understanding of their ecology and distribution.

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## General Information

Project Title: **Red Sea Dolphin Project**

HEPCA field Biologists: **Marina Costa, Amina Cesario, Maddalena Fumagalli**

Scientific supervisors: **Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara, Mahmoud Hanafy**

Study Area: **Southern Egyptian Red Sea, from Marsa Alam to Abu Ramad**

Research Accommodation: **MV Red Sea Defender**

Expedition duration: **10 days**

Team Size min/max: **3/10 volunteers**

Language Onboard: **English**

Write to [booking@hepca.com](mailto:booking@hepca.com) for your inquiries, for schedule and prices.

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# The Expedition

## 1. Project Overview

Over the last two decades, the living resources of the Red Sea have suffered from an array of human impacts including irrational land use, intensive coastal development, overfishing, pollution and curio trade. In addition, the Red Sea is potentially at great risk from the impacts of climate change. The effect of human activities on marine resources cannot be sufficiently predicted due mainly to the lack of scientific research.

Despite the recognition of the value of the natural treasures of the Red Sea from both an ecological and economic perspective, the pursuit of the required knowledge to conserve and sustainably manage these resources has been slow.

The Egyptian Red Sea south of Marsa Alam, where tourism is still in its early stages, seems to represent a rare example of unspoiled marine wilderness. Indications from previous dedicated research highlight that this largely untouched marine area is home to extraordinarily beautiful coral reefs, dolphins, dugongs, turtles, whale sharks, manta rays and other creatures, collectively known as marine "charismatic megafauna".

From what is known about development programmes, it is highly likely that the Southern coast of Egypt will be the object of "traditional" tourism development in the near to medium future, catering to mass tourism similar to that in Hurghada and Sharm-el-Sheikh, which is certain to lead to the decline and possibly the disappearance of its valuable habitats and associated flora and fauna.

In contrast to the possibility described above, a brighter scenario can be imagined. Areas of highest ecological interest can be identified and steps taken to allow touristic development to proceed in a sustainable way that allows these endangered natural resources to continue to flourish.

The Red Sea Dolphin Project is the first research project extensively dedicated on dolphins and whales (cetaceans) in the Egyptian Red Sea. The research will provide scientific data about cetacean abundance, distribution, habitat preferences and information about existing or potential threats from human activities. To achieve this goal a monitoring has been conducted on HEPCA's research vessel since June 2010 using field techniques as visual and acoustics survey, photo-identification, behavioral sampling from the surface and underwater, and genetic sampling. Visual and acoustic survey are extensively conducted during summer and winter season. Distance sampling methodology has been used to plan and design the survey. Navigation and environmental data are continually recorded as well as encounters with birds, turtles, sharks, dugongs and other species. Human activities are also monitored. Cetacean vocalizations are listened and recorded through a towed hydrophone array. When a sighting occurs, reaction/interaction with the boat, species, group size and composition, behavior and, whenever possible, regurgitation/faecal and genetic samples are collected. Photo-identification

technique is applied allowing the identification of single individuals and, therefore, providing fundamental insights on population's ecology, trend and structure.

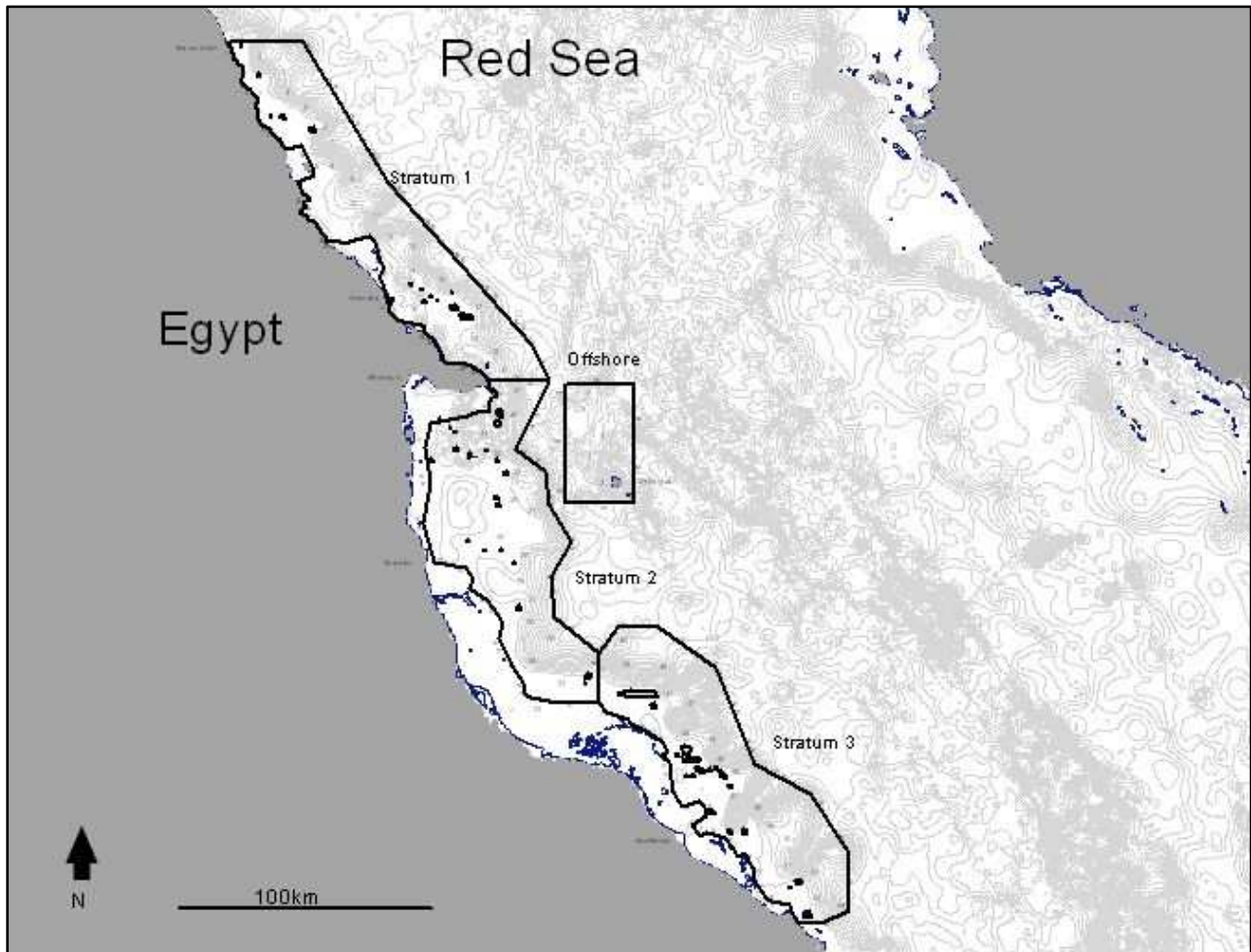
During the survey, a systematic monitoring of the offshore reefs will be carried out with the aim to create a sensitive map of these essential habitats for many species. Particular attention is devoted to "hot spots" sites as Samadai and Satayah reefs, that spinner dolphins use as resting areas during the daytime. These reefs represent a natural laboratory by allowing extended underwater observations otherwise not possible in the open sea.

The Red Sea Dolphin Project is opened to those who are willing to contribute to research and conservation activities. The research team, composed by three resident biologists from HEPCA and five interns coming from all over the world, will involve the participants in all the field activities including cetacean observation (underwater and from the surface), data collection and data entry. Eco-volunteers will have the possibility to deepen their knowledge about cetacean ecology, marine life and advanced research methodologies.

The overall goal of this project is to provide high quality data that will supply detailed information on the abundances of all cetaceans, make possible the mapping of the habitat distributions of the key species, and allow us to underline potential threats. This study will make valuable information available to policy makers and environmental managers. This information will include the development of widely-applicable management measures and a proposal for the development of a network of marine protected areas.

## 2. Research Area

The study area is spread over 50km from the coast and 460km from Marsa Alam all the way south to the Sudanese border.



**Fig.1** - The study area is divided in 3 sectors (strata) and one small area offshore.

The area intersects two environmental reserves: Wadi El Gemal protected area and the Elba protectorate. The study area encompasses some of the few pristine areas on the Egyptian Red Sea coast, as coastal development is still in its early stages. Pristine reefs and islands as well as several mangroves and sea grass meadows are found throughout the research zone. The area is extremely rich in marine species including dugongs, cetaceans and sharks.

### 3. Project Staff

HEPCA's international research team is composed of scientists specialized in many different marine environment topics. Joining the HEPCA research project, you will have the chance to work in close contact with some of them and acquire various skills. A short description of the resident researchers follows.

**Marina** is the principal field investigator. She holds a degree in Biological Sciences and a Master's in Environmental Policy and Economy. Her previous research includes fieldwork with Tethys Research Institute in the Adriatic Sea and in Greece. In 2005 and 2006, she participated in a monitoring project on cetaceans in the Strait of Messina, Italy. Moreover, in 2005 and 2006, she worked as principal field investigator with the Dolphin Habitat Conservation and Sustainable Use project in the Egyptian Red Sea. Finally, in 2008, she joined the Cetacean Research and Rescue Unit in the Moray Firth, Scotland. Marina holds a PADI advanced diving license and a nautical license. She can speak Italian, French, English and some Modern Greek. She is a research student at St. Andrews University - Scotland, UK.

**Amina** holds a degree in Biological Science from The University of Milan. In 2006, she worked as field assistant within the Dolphin Habitat Conservation and Sustainable Use Project in the Egyptian Red Sea, focusing her research on spinner dolphin feeding habits and habitat use. In 2008, she joined the Murdoch University Cetacean Research Unit in Western Australia as a research assistant. In 2009, she also collaborated with the Civic Aquarium of Milan. Amina holds a FIAS-CMAS diving license and can speak Italian and English. Amina is a Ph.D. student at the Hong Kong University.

**Maddalena** graduated with a degree in Biological Sciences in 2008, also from The University of Milan. Her thesis focused on socioecology of spinner dolphins in the Egyptian Red Sea under The Dolphin Habitat Conservation and Sustainable Use Project. In 2008, she worked as a scientific guide in Tunisia. Finally, in 2009, she worked at the Civic Aquarium of Milan. Maddalena holds a PADI advanced diving license and can speak Italian, English and French.

To incorporate local expertise Egyptian student from local universities will assist during the entire season. International interns will also be on board during the cruise.

## Daily Life in the Field

### 4. Volunteer Training and Assignments

All the researchers involved in this project are highly experienced in working with volunteers from various backgrounds and cultures. As essential members of the research team, participants will be fully involved in all aspects of this project; learning about the animals (dolphins, fish, turtles, corals, etc.) and their marine environment through first-hand experience. Working closely alongside the researchers and the crew, volunteers will learn about different aspects of field research methodologies with specific training on equipment and software use and high quality data collection.

During the marine mammal survey, participants will be assigned either to computer or observation duty. Whenever cetaceans are spotted, volunteers will assist with counting animals, recording the composition and structure of groups (i.e. number of newborns, calves, juveniles and adults), observing behaviour, determining geographical positions and taking photographs and/or videos (Fig.2).



**Fig. 2** - (Left) Crew collecting pictures from the boat. (Right) Pantropical spotted dolphin's jump.

Whenever possible, volunteers will also assist in the skin sample collection. Furthermore, through a towed hydrophone, participants will be able to listen to the sounds of cetaceans detected in real time during daytime or night-time navigation. Data entry and preliminary analysis will provide participants with opportunities to improve their software skills and to understand how to use scientific data for conservation purposes.

The researchers will give a series of lectures taking advantage of PowerPoint presentations, short videos, games and other interactive tools (Fig.3). Talks will be delivered in an informative but relaxed and enjoyable manner and volunteers will be encouraged to participate, report their own experiences and share their views.



**Fig. 3** - (Left) Night movie on the sundeck. (Right) lectures about marine mammals on the main saloon.

The list below outlines possible topics:

- Marine biology;
- Corals and Coral Reefs Ecosystems;
- Fish, Turtles, Dugongs and Birds;
- Dolphins, Whales and Dugongs;
- Cetacean conservation;
- Research equipment: hydrophone, cameras, binoculars, GPS (Global Positioning System), software and databases;
- Dolphin photo-identification techniques;

When bad sea conditions do not allow the navigation volunteers will be involved in the direct observation of marine organisms and will aid in coral reef monitoring. Data could be collected either during snorkelling or diving sessions (depending on the sea condition, area accessibility and participant skills). Assignments in the water may include identifying, count and taking pictures of corals, molluscs, echinoderms, algae and fish. Participants will help researcher to provide a physical description of the environment surrounding reefs which will be used to establish the status of the reef and to measure any occurring change in the environment.

The balance between survey work and lectures will depend upon weather conditions, amount of time spent at sea and participants interest or request.

Please be aware that schedules depend on weather constraints, season (e.g. daylight duration), research needs or unexpected events. Your cooperation and understanding are appreciated.

## **5. Itinerary, Daily Schedule and Tasks**

A tentative trip itinerary is shown below

### **Day 1**

- Arrival to the boat; usually at 12:
- Breaking the ice: presentation of the team members and the crew; information about rules and safety on board

- Introduction to HEPCA and to the Red Sea Dolphin Project
- Movement to the study area

## **Day 2**

- Research protocol training
- Research equipment practice
- Fieldwork (according to individual schedules), data entry and analysis
- Interactive sessions on different topics

## **Day 3-9**

- Fieldwork (according to individual schedules), data entry and analysis
- Interactive sessions on different topics

## **Day 10**

- Pack-up and depart (usually around 12)

Navigation during daylight is usually carried out from sunrise (between 4:30 to 6:30 depending on the season) to the sunset (between 16 to 19 depending on the season). A break of 2 hours is often made in a offshore reef in order to rest the engine.

**Please be aware that the schedule will vary depending on weather and research priorities.** For instance, a very windy day may force the staff to postpone a survey at open sea and instead conduct data collection on coral reefs or organise lecture sessions. Please try to be flexible and understand that a project dealing with wild animals at sea cannot be 100% predictable.

A tentative daily schedule is shown below:

- Breakfast between 5:00 to 8:00, according to daily activities
- Fieldwork sessions according to assigned shifts
- Short interactive lecture (30 min)
- Lunch between 12 and 14
- Fieldwork sessions/resting time according to assigned shifts
- Dinner between 19:30 and 20:30
- Evening interactive sessions or video night

**Please be aware that the schedule will vary depending on season, weather and research priorities.** For instance, when the boat is navigating the observation task will be continued. People busy with the observation roles will have the meal at the end of their task.

During the marine mammal survey, fieldwork sessions include different tasks, which are scheduled and assigned in order for each participant to cover all the activities. If participants

feel uneasy with a given task, they will be assigned to another one or given more specific training, depending on the circumstances. Volunteers will actively engage in visual observation from the skydeck. Data about position and speed of the boat are automatically recorded and stored on the database. Volunteers will be asked to help enter additional data continually when the boat is moving and whenever animals are encountered.



**Fig.4** - Location of observers on the flydeck.

Furthermore, volunteers will contribute to preliminary analysis of digital photos. Digital photos will be filed, named, cropped and prepared for subsequent **matching** of the dolphin's dorsal fin. Participants will then engage in individual photo-identification based on natural marks found on the fins by matching the dolphins photographed at sea with a digital catalogue of known animals.

An example of shifts schedule for ten participants is shown in Table.1. Every shift lasts 60 min. One hour of observation under the sun is followed by one hour of rest or work at the computer.

Shift	Time	Name
1	8:00	Observer on the right
2	9:00	Data entry
3	10:00	Observer on the left
4	11:00	Resting
5	12:00	Acoustic listener
6	13:00	Observer on the center
7	14:00	Data entry
8	15:00	Resting
10	...	...

**Table 1** - Example of a shifts schedule.

During the reef monitoring, researchers and volunteers will work in groups while snorkelling or diving (Fig. 5). Data will be collected via visual survey on the flat, crest and slope of the reef and reordered on underwater sheet. Task in the water may include identifying different kind of living coral and estimate their percentage of coverage, identify main forms of algae, count and taking pictures of molluscs, echinoderms, and fish, investigate possible presence of coral bleaching and disease. Participants will help researcher to provide a physical description of the bottom and of the environment surrounding reefs which will be used to establish the status of the reef and to measure any occurring change in the environment. Once onboard, data will be download and inserted in the project database with the help off the volunteers.

Skills essential to participation include an open mind, flexibility to changing situations and a desire to help and learn. Swimming ability is preferred but not required. Volunteers must be able to stay some period under the sun. No other specific skills are required as full training will be provided onsite. However, volunteers with an interest in photography or proficiency with computers may be able to put such skills to very good use. Additional tasks to be shared with the researchers include caring for common spaces, laboratories and the observation platform as well as the cleaning and upkeep of the research equipment.

During their free time while the boat is anchored, volunteers will have the chance to choose freely between snorkelling in some of the most pristine reefs of the Red Sea or just relaxing on the vessel (Fig. 5). Participants have to bring their own mask, snorkel and fins. It is strongly recommended that divers bring their own diving and snorkelling gear except for air tanks, weights and weight belts. Equipment rental will be possible with a maximum cost of 25 Euros per day except for the three previously-mentioned items which will be available for free. We recommend informing us if you plan to dive in order to have enough diving gears on board: a dedicated form will be sent you together with the project's application form.



**Fig.5** (Left) The team ready for a session in the water.(Right) Relax at sunset.

## 6. Food and Accommodation

The Red Sea Defender is a 35-meter boat (Fig.6) with 11 en-suite cabins each with 2 single beds (Fig.7) and air-conditioning. Sheets, blankets and towels will be provided. The spacious saloon offers comfortable lounging/dining and is ideal for scientists to congregate, present lectures, watch movies and organize quiz games (Fig.7). A help-yourself coffee and tea corner is also available. A large flat-screen and audio/video system are integrated into the design, and the spacious galley and storage facilities offer an excellent cuisine. On the sun deck there is an open semi-shadowed area where volunteers can relax after their shifts of observation or data collection or can have informal lectures.



**Fig.6** - (Left) The Red Sea Defender. (Right) The dive deck.

The observation platform is located on the sky deck which also offers a comfortable area also to rest enjoying the sun.

The Red Sea Defender can carry enough fuel and fresh water to sail 7-8 days at sea. It is equipped with two 5-meter speed boats with 25HP outboard engine that may be used in research activities.



**Fig.7** - (Left) Double cabin. (Right) Main saloon.

Food will be prepared by the crew and served in the large saloon. Water and soft drinks are included. Alcoholic beverages will be available at your own expenses provided you make moderate and appropriate use of it.

Please alert HEPCA to any special dietary requirements as soon as possible. Most special requirements (vegetarianism, intolerance, etc.) will be accommodated.

Please note that mobile signal is not always present, in particular South of Ras Banas or far away from the coast. Radio and satellite phone are on board for safety. **The use of research computers aboard for personal purposes is not permitted.**

## **7. Packing advices**

As the space on board is very limited, we invite participants to bring only what is actually necessary. The checklist below lists all items we suggest you to include in your luggage: please consider it and, for further information, contact HEPCA Team.

### **Essential items**

- Red Sea Dolphin Project Briefing;
- Red Sea Dolphin Project Voucher;
- Visa and passport;
- Photocopies of your passport, flight itinerary and credit cards in case the originals are lost or stolen.

### **Required items**

- Clothing suitable for the navigation: shorts, vests, T-shirts, long-sleeved shirts, sweatshirt, windbreaker comfortable, easy to hand-wash and lightweight;
- Waterproof clothing and a warm jacket for winter;
- Warm clothing for a chilly day or night (comfortable trousers and sweater) and for the interiors where usually air-conditioning is on in summertime;
- Hat or cap;
- Boat shoes (only if you don't want to walk barefoot);
- Sunglasses;
- Swimsuit;
- Mask, snorkel and fins;
- Wet suit or lycra t-shirt and short;
- Diving licence and Logbook.

### **Field supplies**

- Sunscreen lotion (high protection, 20 - 30 SPF or total sun block) and moisturiser;

- Small daypack/rucksack in case of excursions;
- Comfortable shoes and a pair of flip-flops or other shoes (without heels);
- Insect repellent spray or lotion;
- Writing materials/notepad for taking notes;
- USB key or external hard disk (please note that no CD or DVD will be made board).

### **Personal supplies**

- Beach towel;
- Personal toiletries (biodegradable soaps and shampoos are encouraged);
- Personal basic First Aid kit (e.g. anti-diarrhoea pills, antibiotics, antiseptic, insect bite relief, pain reliever, bandages, blister covers, etc.) and personal medications (e.g. allergy medication). Please note that First Aid kit will be on board as well as oxygen.

### **Miscellaneous**

- Pocket money (Egyptian pound and euro/dollars);
- Camera, film/memory cards, extra camera battery, mobile phone, power supply and cables for digital equipment and mobile phones;
- Dry bag or plastic sealable bags for protecting equipment such as camera from dust, humidity, and water.

### **Optional items**

- Earplugs for light sleepers;
- Binoculars (7x50 or 8x50 enlargement suggested).

Bed sheets and bath towels are available onboard.

Please, take weather conditions into consideration when packing for your expedition. Summer months are very hot and you will be exposed to the sun on the boat. It is essential you bring sunglasses, a wide brimmed hat and some light long sleeved clothing to cover up exposed skin if the heat is too intense. You should also bring a high factor sunscreen with you. In the winter if windy or during the night could be chilly so it is important to have sweaters and wind jacket.

Remember to include personal medicines that may require a prescription, like antibiotics, analgesics, antihistamines, and medicines against seasickness (especially useful in case of rough sea). In case of allergies, the participants have to bring their own medicines together with a doctor's declaration indicating the active ingredients.

Participants wearing glasses may want to bring a spare pair.

## **General information about Egypt**

### **Government**

The Arab Republic of Egypt is a semi-presidential republic divided in 29 Governorates. Egypt is one of the most populous countries in Africa and the Middle East with 78.8 million habitants mainly concentrated near the banks of the Nile River and spread across the main centres, such as Cairo and Alexandria.

### **Religion**

Egypt is a predominantly Muslim country with Islam as its state religion. Around 90% of Egyptians are identified as Muslim. There is a large minority of Christians (nearly 10%) and an even smaller community of Jews of about 200, then a tiny number of Egyptians who identify as atheist and agnostic. Religion plays a central role in most Egyptians' lives, The *Adhan* (Islamic call to prayer) that is heard five times a day has the informal effect of regulating the pace of everything from business to media and entertainment, including weekend which is Friday and Saturday. *Ramadan* is the greatest religious observance in Islam and is an annual month of fasting, in 2010 it is expected to begin around mid August.

### **People**

Egyptians are by far the largest ethnic group in Egypt at 91% of the total population. Ethnic minorities include the Abazas, Turks, Greeks, Bedouin Arab tribes living in the eastern deserts and the Sinai Peninsula, the Berber-speaking Siwis (Amazigh) of the Siwa Oasis, and the Nubian communities clustered along the Nile.

### **Food & Drinks**

Egyptian food reflects the country's melting-pot history; native cooks using local ingredients have modified Greek, Turkish, Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian traditions to suit Egyptian budgets, customs, and tastes. The dishes are simple and tasty, made with naturally ripened fruits and vegetables and seasoned with fresh spices. Developed and popularised in the Middle East, the drinking of *ahwa* (coffee) remains a national tradition. Tea, karkadé and fresh juices, as well as soft drinks are common. Bottled water is always available in all areas frequented by tourists. Although devout Muslims refrain from drinking alcohol, imported and local beers, wines, and hard liquors are available in bars, restaurants, and some grocery shops.

### **Health and emergencies**

It is advisable to stay away from raw fruit and vegetables, and drink plenty of liquids. Pharmacies are usually open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. and are staffed by competent professional. Hospitals in Hurghada and Marsa Alam areas include public and private structures. Recompression chambers are located in El Gouna, Hurghada, Safaga and Marsa Alam.

## **Weather**

Throughout Egypt, days are commonly warm or hot, and nights are cool. Egypt has only two seasons: a mild winter from November to April and a hot summer from May to October. In Hurghada area average temperatures range from 24°C in January to 42°C in August.

## **Languages**

Official language is Arabic, nonetheless, due to the tourism presence throughout the region, people speaking European languages are commonly found.

**Local time :** GMT +2 in winter and GMT +3 in summer

**International dialing code :** 0020

## **Local Currency: Egyptian Pounds (L.E.)**

Average exchange  
1USD = 5.62 L.E.  
1 Euro = 7.58 L.E.  
1 GBP = 8.53 L.E.

**Electric current :** 220 Volts

## **Emergency Numbers:**

Police 122  
Ambulance 123  
Tourist Police 126

## **How to get to the South**

Hurghada is easily reachable by plane or land transports. Marsa Alam and southern areas are more remote but still well connected to Europe and northern cities such as Hurghada and Cairo. A brief list of the main transportation facilities follows.

### **By Plane**

**Cairo International Airport** is served by domestic and International flights on a daily basis.

**Hurghada International Airport** is connected with Cairo through several domestic flights and with European cities through charter flights.

**Marsa Alam International Airport** has charter flights from Europe and domestic flights to/from Cairo and Hurghada.

### **By Boat**

International Fast Ferries runs fast boats from/to Sharm el Sheik and Hurghada.

**Red Sea Ferries** [www.a-1hotels.com/eg/allaboutegypt/html/red\\_sea\\_ferries.html](http://www.a-1hotels.com/eg/allaboutegypt/html/red_sea_ferries.html)

## **By Bus**

Bus companies run regular lines from Cairo to Hurghada, Safaga, El Quseir and Marsa Alam. There are also lines connecting Hurghada with Marsa Alam, some of them going all the way down to Shalatin.

**Upper Egypt** [www.bus.com.eg/EBus/OnlineServicesEn/Home/upperegypt/services.aspx](http://www.bus.com.eg/EBus/OnlineServicesEn/Home/upperegypt/services.aspx)

## **By Taxi**

Regular taxis are a comfortable and rapid means of transportation. They are available everywhere in the major centres (Cairo and Hurghada) and most of the drivers can speak a Basic English. Bear in mind that, although all cabs are equipped with a taximeter, it is often turned off. Ask to switch it on or, if you don't succeed, try to bargain over the price.

Hotels and resorts organise transfer and taxi service at fixed rates: contact the reception of your hotel for more information.

## **Southern Egyptian Red Sea**

### **Hurghada**

The city, until a few years ago, remained a small fishing village. But today, it has gone on to become the foremost tourist resort of the Red Sea coast and an international centre for aquatic sports (windsurfing, sailing, kite-surfing, snorkeling and diving). The unique underwater gardens offshore are some of the finest in the world, justifiably famous among divers. Giftun Islands, Fanus, Sha'ab El Erg and Abu Ramada are among the most popular dive sites. The warm waters here are ideal for many varieties of rare fish and coral reefs, which may also be observed through glass bottom boats. This area has many fine accommodations, usually offering warm and efficient service. Restaurants are mostly along the main road and in the new Marina, they offer a great variety of food, from Indian to Sushi to Greek. Today, Hurghada is known as a party town, particularly among Europeans. Locals and others will tell you that life begins at night in Hurghada, with the many, many clubs. They are particularly frequented by the young, but certainly many others of all ages.

### **El Gouna**

At 20 km north of Hurghada, is a highly organized resort community. A network of canals allow many houses to have their own strip of beach, even hundreds of meters inland. Most of these canals are crossed by small stone bridges. There are two main beaches and three centralized areas in El Gouna, housing shops, bars and restaurants. El Gouna hosts also a golf course.

### **Marsa Alam**

Twenty years ago it was little more than a sleepy fishing village, but the region's beautiful beaches and its' virgin coral reefs are set to make it a prime holiday spot. Today hotels and resorts are spread all along the coastline. The town itself is still small and unfrequented by tourists but it is growing at a fast pace, offering new services, shops and accommodations. Popular sites include Abu Dabbab (Dugong) , Samadai Reef ("Dolphin House") and Elphinstone

(sharks), other many incredibly rich dive sites are disseminated along the coast and in the nearest offshore reefs.

### **Wadi El Gemal National Park**

The park encompasses some of the most endangered habitats and wildlife, both marine (mangroves and Wadi El Gemal Island) and terrestrial (sand dunes and emerald mines) covering nearly 100km of coastal strip. The Ababda, the dwellers of this region, are an ancient people with a rich and colourful heritage which is also endangered. Camel rides and excursions are organized on a daily basis.

### **Hamata and Berenice**

Located 120km south of Marsa Alam, thanks to its privileged position, Hamata became recently and rapidly the best starting point for cruises towards the southern region. Satayah reef, Sha'ab Claudio and Qulaan Islands are among the most popular sites in the area. Still few resorts and hotels are present in the area.

### **Shalateen**

It is a very small village in the Red Sea Governorate located on the Sudanese border and inhabited by several Egyptian and Sudanese nomad tribes. The Camel market in Shalatin is one of the most attractive places to be visited in this area that is renown for its very hot weather.

### **Moving around**

If you have the possibility to move within the country and spend some days in places other than the coast, the **Nile Valley (Luxor and Aswan)**, **Cairo** and **Alexandria** can offer interesting cultural and social opportunities and entertainments and are warmly recommended. Daily excursions to Cairo and Luxor are organized by operators in Hurghada and Marsa Alam.

## **Booking Procedure**

### **Contribution**

Please contact [booking@hepca.com](mailto:booking@hepca.com) for information and booking.

## **After Booking**

### **Arranging Travel**

You will need to make your own travel and transport arrangements to and from the project rendez-vous point which will be, depending on research needs, at Marsa Alam or Hamata harbor. Boarding will be permitted at 12pm on the first day of the expedition. Disembarkation time cannot be exactly predicted, but would probably be around 12pm on the last day. In any case, the boat departure/return time will be settled according to volunteers' arrival/departure needs. You will receive a confirmation of rendez-vous, boarding and landing location and time, a week before the departure. We recommend that you make your travel reservations as early as possible. Try to ensure that the tickets are refundable or changeable, bearing in mind that there is always a possibility that expedition dates or rendez-vous times might change.

### **Visas and Passports**

Volunteers are responsible for securing any necessary visas. In Egypt, visas can be purchased at the airport for citizens of most countries. However, if you are unsure about this, check with your travel company or the relevant embassy. If you have to apply for a visa from your country, allow plenty of time and always ask for a tourist visa. Your passport is required to have a minimum of six months validity from the date of return from your home country.

Please check all requirements with the relevant embassy.

### **Vaccinations**

None vaccination is required, however hepatitis A, typhoid and tetanus vaccine are recommended. Please contact your travel doctor regarding vaccinations and other medical advices prior to travel to Egypt.

### **What to Bring with You**

The weather in Egypt is temperate. However, exposure to the sun, wind and the sea are to be taken into consideration. In our expeditions, you will spend a significant amount of time under the sun: adequate protection, sunglasses, hats and appropriate clothing are paramount.

We encourage you to refer to our "Packing Advices" (page 15).

## **Thank You for Your Participation!**

Hurghada Environmental Protection and Conservation Association (**HEPCA**)

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